

- Long term care provider associations should develop a plan to improve the retention rates among paraprofessionals and professionals in the long term care industry. The plan should include mechanisms to improve job satisfaction, increase pay, develop career paths or improve working conditions.

Given the current budget constraints facing the state of North Carolina, implementation of these recommendations may be impractical in the near future. There are, however, several state-sponsored initiatives currently in place that can benefit long term care facilities in the recruitment and retention of nursing personnel. The North Carolina Center for Nursing offers a Recruitment and Retention Grants Program that provides seed grants to health care facilities and/or associations to develop retention programs designed to recognize the work of nurse employees and/or to recruit people into the field of nursing. A limited number of these grants, of up to \$5,000, are available in odd numbered years to all nurse employers in North Carolina and are awarded on the basis of competitive grant applications. Another effort designed to help nurse employers develop successful recruitment and retention programs is the compilation of a “best practices” library that showcases programs that have been found to be effective by employers. Currently under development, health care facilities will be able to access these descriptive summaries and use them to develop in-house programs when the library is completed.

For retaining nurses in the profession, recognizing excellence in direct patient care, and developing leadership skills, the NC Center for Nursing sponsors the biennial Institute for Nursing Excellence. This weeklong professional retreat experience recognizes exemplary RNs who have demonstrated excellence in their practice and professional roles. All registered nurses in North Carolina are eligible if they are employed in nursing full time, have three or more years experience, and spend at least 50% of their nursing time in direct patient care. Applicants may be nominated by a colleague, a patient, or an employer. This program has proven to keep nurses at the bedside and should be used by employers as one option for recognizing outstanding employees.

To deal with the problem of an aging and possibly shrinking nursing workforce in the next decade, the North Carolina Center for Nursing has launched a statewide campaign designed to promote interest among youth and minorities in nursing. Televised public service announcements to promote nursing as an attractive career option began running in the Summer of 2000. In addition, thousands of young people are being asked to “...consider nursing” by volunteers representing the Center for Nursing at the annual State Fair. Videos, posters, and other educational materials are being developed for distribution to schools. Newspaper inserts profiling nursing roles are being distributed throughout the state. A nursing exploration patch program is being developed for the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts and Career Explorer programs. The Center is also enhancing its web site to serve as a clearinghouse for NC nursing career information to be used by guidance counselors, teachers, students and the public.

Finally, the state of North Carolina, through the Center for Nursing, has implemented two programs that directly affect employers’ ability to recruit and retain nursing personnel. The Nursing CareerLine is a telephone- and Internet-based job listing service available only to North Carolina employers. Job-seeking nurses can call into the system from anywhere in the world and hear which North Carolina employers have open positions in their area of interest. Through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Center also sponsors nine nurse workforce planning groups distributed throughout the state designed to bring nurse employers, educators, and practitioners together to develop creative solutions to local nursing workforce problems. These grass-roots groups have been very successful in addressing recruitment and retention concerns for health care facilities, while providing a forum for local long-range planning for nursing resource needs.